

A Note From Josh

After much prayer and discussion with the elders of Door of Hope SE, I want to address the questions that have come up around the current mask mandate for indoor gatherings in Oregon.

First of all, let me say that we care deeply about the safety of our community and recognize the reality of COVID-19 and the very real threat it poses to those who fall within the category of the most vulnerable. We also acknowledge the contagiousness of the Delta variant and its impact on hospital capacity.

I want you to know that as the lead pastor of our church, I made the decision unilaterally to leave it up to the discretion of DOH attendees to make their own choices around the mask mandate during Sunday gatherings. I made this choice for a variety of reasons, two of which I will mention here:

First: up to this point, decisions around COVID-19 had not been handled by the elders, but by the executive team and staff.

Secondly: there was confusion on my part around what the church is required to do by the state. Back in December, the governor had moved earlier guidelines from 'required' to 'recommended' when it came to communities of faith. This is not the case with the new mandate.

Amongst Door of Hope SE's staff, elders, and church, there are a variety of opinions and even disagreements around the efficacy of masks, vaccinations, government mandates, separation of church and state, and even interpretations of biblical passages around government authority (which is a secondary issue). But Scripture is clear on its call to submit to one another in love and to submit to the elders of the church, who are called to serve and protect the community.

I love and believe in the group of men who are elders here, and after much prayer and discussion we as an elder team have decided the decision regarding the mandate is best made together. **In a desire to submit in love to one another and maintain strong witness in the city where we are called, we are asking our congregation to comply with the current mask mandate.** Having said that, we as the elders are not comfortable with placing responsibility on the leadership to police or enforce such a mandate.

One of the beautiful aspects of Door of Hope has been the way the Lord has drawn people from such a wide cross-section of the city around the centrality of the cross. There is a sense that the Spirit is truly moving in our community right now, and this has flowed out of our resilience, by God's grace, during this last year and a half. We also recognize the likelihood of COVID's lasting power and the possibility of its spread at DOH. It is not our desire to be cavalier or controversial, and we do not want to be

drawn into a spirit of fear or divisiveness. We do not want to be pulled into the political posturing of the right or the left, as our loyalty is first and foremost to Jesus and His kingdom.

We trust you will make a responsible decision for the people around you when it comes to our church gatherings. We're relieved to see that there have been no COVID-19 deaths in Multnomah County for several weeks (source: *New York Times*). So even though we are all tired, let us be patient together.

In light of all this, we ask you please not attend a Door of Hope gathering if you feel at all sick or have any COVID symptoms. If you attend a Door of Hope gathering and test positive for COVID afterwards, please notify the DOH staff ASAP so that we can address the situation as needed.

Please know that the elders are available for any questions or concerns. I am sorry if there has been confusion — but know also how much I love all of you! Let's continue to pray that the Lord would work during this time in our church and city.

—Josh